

STEVE BISHOP ALL AGES

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Private View: Wednesday 8 June, 6–8pm

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Blaise Castle, Bristol, 1930

The home where I grew up was near a park that had a little castle perched upon a hill. I remember trekking up that hill, which seemed endless and steep, to look at the castle. It was always closed. I can only recall one time the castle was open. I walked up a spiral staircase to the top, past piles of dead pigeons, and looked over the edge of the tower down to the ground. I didn't quite understand the castle and wondered why it seemed plain and uneventful. Walking around it,

there was the sense that a detail or something of interest was around the corner, but each side seemed to be the same. It looked old, and it was old, at least much older than my childhood years. Later I came to understand that it wasn't medieval as advertised, but a Victorian folly built in 1766 in the Gothic Revival style. I have been several times in the past few years hoping to go inside but every time I visited, the castle was closed.



Claude Bell's Brontosaurus in 1979, 1986 and 2005

The *Cabazon Dinosaurs*, formerly *Claude Bell's Dinosaurs*, is a roadside attraction on Interstate 10 in Southern California. Bell, who owned a restaurant called The Wheel Inn, built the two life-size dinosaurs to draw the attention of passing motorists. Construction on the 150-foot Brontosaurus began in the mid 1960s and was completed in the mid '70s. A 50-foot-tall Tyrannosaurus rex was added later. The two dinosaurs were a success, even appearing as a location in several children's movies in the 1980s. The restaurant was sold in the 1990s, and the new owners repurposed the Brontosaurus – which was actually a dinosaur-shaped building housing

the gift shop – to be a Creationist museum with displays depicting humans and dinosaurs living alongside each other and gifts with slogans denouncing evolution. The owner is an adherent of Young Earth Creationism, which posits that the Earth is less than 10,000 years old. In order to reconcile their beliefs with scientific findings, including carbon-dating dinosaur fossils, Young Earth Creationists believe that the Earth was created with the 'appearance' of age, like a pair of distressed-denim jeans, and that certain aspects of the planet and the universe were created 'old' in order for nature to function as intended.



The first artificial fossil, created in 24 hours in lab conditions in 2018

The dinosaur bones on view in museums are not actually made of bone, but rather fossilised bone. Fossils are minerals that have slowly taken the space of organic matter (in this case bone) when buried under intense pressure, like a cast being filled with stone. The process of fossilisation takes around 10,000 years, which coincidentally is as old as the age of the Earth according to Young Earth Creationists. The two roadside dinosaurs didn't live

alongside humankind, but neither did they live alongside each other: Tyrannosaurus rex is in fact closer in time to our present time than it was to a Brontosaurus, as there is an approximately 80 million years gap between them. The Mesozoic Era, also known as 'the age of the reptiles', lasted 186 million years and was bookended by two mass extinctions, the last of which was 66 million years ago.



The Southeast Asian Red Junglefowl

The type of modern-day broiler chickens used for meat production have been bred over the past 8000 years to become barely recognisable from their ancestor, the Southeast Asian Red Junglefowl. Chicken farming exploded in the 20th century and despite the growing popularity of vegetarianism, chicken consumption across the world is increasing every year. Over 60 billion chickens are slaughtered yearly, consumed by a global human population of 8 billion. Food waste and bones are routinely buried in landfills, where the

oxygen-deprived conditions would potentially allow for them to fossilise and be preserved for millions of years, whereas human interment in caskets allows for the breakdown of bodies and bones, and within 100 years those bones would leave no trace.

Birds are dinosaurs, belonging to a group called theropods, which also includes Tyrannosaurus rex. When future civilisations dig up the earth's surface and reach the layer of the present day, they will find more dinosaur fossils than it's ever held previously.



Monte Testaccio, Rome

There is an artificial hill in Rome created between 40 BCE and 260 CE comprised entirely from discarded amphorae, the two-handed ceramic vessels used to transport wine, grain and other consumables, in this case ones used to transport olive oil imported from what is now southern Spain. The mound comprises an estimated 53 million amphorae, but rather than being a chaotic tip, it is a neatly stacked mound covered with lime to prevent mould and smell, and grown over with vegetation. It is unusual to find a large landfill site like this as Ancient Romans were keen recyclers. It was common practice with ampho-

rae to reuse them by way of breaking them down into small pieces and creating a type of rough aggregated cement called *opus signinum*. This mixture was used extensively throughout the Roman Empire to build walls that would then be finished with a coat of plaster, which had the bonus of hiding the variety of materials they are made of. The rubble that constituted building materials like this was found at designated recycling sites along the city walls, where material was piled up before it was sorted and resold: broken ceramics and rubble as building material, wood for fuel, metal and glass to be melted down and made anew.



Bin men, London, 1878

When humans were hunter-gatherers, food was consumed relatively close to where it was found and nature provided packaging in skins and shells. Humans developed papers and cloth to wrap and preserve with, clay to make vessels, wooden boxes to pack with salt, animal guts used as shields. All of these things would rot and perish if left to the elements. It was the growth of urban populations during the Industrial Revolution, close-quartered living, and the Victorians' greater understanding of disease and sanitation that led to an increased

desire to package perishable items. Tin cans, and later, glass bottles and jars were typical ways to store food and drinks.

The first household rubbish bin was introduced in England in 1875. This was a container that was collected on a weekly basis by a team of sanitation workers. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, the average household in the UK 'threw out' very little; leftover food was fed to animals, and what couldn't be reused, burned or collected by rag-and-bone men was primarily broken ceramics.



Buxton Spring bottled water circa 1850 to 2006

The first plastic bottle was produced in 1973. Plastic had advantages over glass; being lighter, it is easier to transport, and also less prone to deteriorating. The 20th century saw human society increasingly grow into a consuming culture. Humans had disposable income to spend on things wrapped in disposable packaging, and later even intentionally disposable goods. All of this plastic had to go somewhere when we were done with it. It primarily went to landfills, since it was cheaper to produce new plastic

than recycle old and used plastic, and so, society changed again from consumers of goods to producers of waste.

In 2022, the majority of UK plastic still goes to landfills, where leachate (the water that seeps through a landfill) is released into the environment carrying microplastics with it. It seems every month there's a new place scientists have found plastic; at the bottom of the ocean, in embryos, in our blood, and in our lungs. We outlive the product but we don't outlive the packaging.



The Utilidors, Disneyworld

There is a hidden underground network of tunnels underneath Disneyworld Orlando. The elaborate system, named The Utilidors, was designed from the start of the construction of the theme park, which opened in 1971. The idea for it reportedly came after Walt Disney saw a Disneyland (opened 1955 in Anaheim, California) staff member dressed in a Wild West costume walking through the future-themed area Tomorrowland to get to where they were going. The underground tunnel network allows for staff, security and workers in costume to travel across Disneyland without themed worlds colliding.

The Utilidors also house an AVAC (automated vacuum assisted collection) system consisting of vast stretches of pipes that suck rubbish underground at high speeds from special disposal sites on the surface. This enables rubbish to be collected from the street level without garbage trucks being seen driving around the themed areas also breaking the illusion. The pipes converge at a final site far from the public areas of the park, where it is compacted and then taken away. Disneyworld produces enough rubbish to fill a full-size garbage truck every seven and a half minutes.



Disneyland, Anaheim, California in 1958 and late 1980s



Brittany, France, 2019

There was a bizarre phenomenon off the coast of Brittany, where, along with the usual algae and flotsam, a stream of novelty Garfield telephones had been regularly washing up on a beach for the past 35 years. The mystery was solved in 2019 when it was discovered that a stray shipping container filled

with merchandise had gotten lodged in a nearby cave and was slowly leaking its contents into the sea. The cave was not accessible by foot and so the source of the plastic Garfield pieces remained an enigma. A slow ungifting. Cracked and bleached orange plastic casing rejected by the ocean.



Wholesale catalogue for Rock Lords's action figures, 1986

When I was young I had a few Rock Lords action figures. These were Transformer-like toys that turned from rocks into humanoids and subsequently back from humanoids into rocks. I recall how banal they seemed when they were 'rocks'. Rock Lords was a spin-off of the CoBots universe, released in 1984 with the familiar format where they had their own televised cartoon designed to sell the toys and give them context. In one episode of the tv show, titled 'Trash and Treachery', a GoBot travelled to Earth and attacked a global summit

on pollution, stealing an experimental super-algae designed to consume plastic waste. Algae is responsible for creating 70 percent of the earth's oxygen, but is also the main constituent of crude oil, from which plastic is derived. It's ironic that the GoBots went on a mission to capture and utilise a substance that would rid the world of plastic, on a tv show made purely to sell more plastic toys. Not to mention that this algae, had it existed, would have also caused their demise, their bodies being made of plastic.

Since 2019, recycling company TerraCycle has started building plants utilising a new recycling process called depolymerisation. This essentially turns all plastics back into the crude oil from which they were made, to be used as fuel or to create new plastic. The problems with traditional plastic recycling is that not all plastics are

suitable, and plastic can only be recycled a few times before it becomes too weak to use. Also, the obvious issue that only a fraction of plastic waste is actually recycled. Depolymerisation is promising as it would allow plastic to partake in an infinite loop, reducing forms to their molecular roots only to be incarnated again.

*The Matterhorn, an artificial mountain built at a 1:100 scale of the original mountain in the Alps.
Disneyland, Anaheim, California. Photographed in 2012*

